

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 CAPE TOWN 1148

EXDIS

DEPT (AF) PASS USUN AND OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3
TAGS: PGOV, PORG, SF, US
SUBJECT: VORSTER ON US-SOUTH AFRICAN RELATIONS AND RELATED TOPICS

1. SUMMARY: DURING INTRODUCTORY CALL LASTING NEARLY AN HOUR LATE JUNE 7, I WAS TREATED TO THE FULL RANGE OF PRIME MINISTER JOHN VORSTER'S BLUNT COMPLAINTS ABOUT AMERICAN ACTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA, RANGING FROM HIS FEELINGS ABOUT HIS VIENNA TALKS WITH VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE TO HIS OBVIOUS DISPLEASURE ABOUT EMBASSY/ICA SHOWINGS OF "ROOTS" TO SOUTH AFRICAN AUDIENCES. I MANAGED TO TURN THE CONVERSATION MORE TO NAMIBIA AND RHODESIA TOWARD THE END, BUT NOT UNTIL WE HAD DEBATED SEVERAL OBVIOUS SORE SPOTS IN US-SA RELATIONS. FOR THE MOST PART, VORSTER WAS HIS USUAL UNSMILING SELF BUT NOT PERSONALLY UNFRIENDLY, AND HE CONCLUDED BY EXPRESSING THE HOPE I WOULD ENJOY MY STAY IN SOUTH AFRICA. END SUMMARY.

2. I CALLED ON VORSTER AT HIS PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE JUST AFTER HE CAME AWAY FROM A FAIRLY SHARP EXCHANGE WITH THE LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION AND STILL WORE HIS BEST
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DEBATING SCOWL. AFTER SOME PLEASANTRIES ABOUT THE UNSEASONABLY WARM AND SUNNY WEATHER IN CAPE TOWN (BAD FOR THE FARMERS), VORSTER SET THE TONE OF THE CONVERSATION BY SAYING THAT HE WOULD SPEAK RIGHT OUT WITH ME AND SAY THAT, UNFORTUNATELY, OUR TWO NATIONS WERE DRIFTING APART, THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAD NEVER DONE ANYTHING TO HARM THE UNITED STATES BUT THAT THE US WAS HURTING SOUTH AFRICA AND MAKING

THINGS HARDER FOR HIM. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT REPEAT HIS EARLIER CHARGES THAT THE US WAS TRYING TO DESTROY SA "BY FINESSE" OR THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION WAS IMPLACABLY HOSTILE TO SA, HE SAID HE HAD "FELT THE WHIP ON HIS BACK". HAVING TALKED WITH "MEN LIKE MONDALE," HE WAS CONVINCED THAT THE US FOUND SOUTH AFRICA AN EMBARRASSMENT, AND THAT IT WAS OUR PURPOSE TO FORCE CHANGES UPON SOUTH AFRICA REGARDLESS OF ITS INTERESTS. HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND HOW THE US COULD HAVE ANY REASON OR RIGHT TO STICK ITS NOSE INTO THEIR AFFAIRS. I RESPONDED THAT I WAS MOST CONCERNED AT HIS ASSUMPTION THAT US INTENTIONS WERE MALICIOUS OR HOSTILE, SAYING THAT THE US WOULD LIKE TO HAVE BETTER RELATIONS WITH SOUTH AFRICA BUT THAT WE ARE GENUINELY AND DEEPLY CONCERNED ABOUT THE DENIAL OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND OF THE INEVITABLE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF SUCH A SITUATION. I AGREED THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAD DONE NOTHING DIRECTLY TO HARM THE US BUT NOTED THAT WE WERE CONCERNED THAT THE PROBLEMS OF RACIAL CONFLICT NOT ONLY THREATENED TO AFFECT SOUTH AFRICA BUT ALSO ENDANGERED THE CONTINENT AS A WHOLE AND IMPINGED UPON OUR INTERESTS AS WELL.

3. VORSTER PICKED UP THIS POINT AND RELATED THE STORY OF AN HONEST AMERICAN POLITICAL FIGURE WHO HAD TOLD HIM LONG AGO THAT SOUTH AFRICA AND ONE OTHER COUNTRY (UNNAMED) HAD NO RIGHT TO EXIST, AND THAT IF THEY COULD DO SO, AMERICANS WOULD WISH THEM AWAY. HE HAD NEVER FORGOTTEN THIS. I
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OBJECTED THAT ONE MIGHT WISH ALL CONFLICT SITUATIONS AWAY BUT THAT DID NOT MEAN THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAD NO RIGHT TO EXIST. HISTORY COULD NOT BE TURNED BACK, AND ONE HAD TO FACE UP TO REALITIES AND PROBLEMS. I FELT THAT AMERICANS ARE NOT UNSYMPATHETIC TO SOUTH AFRICA'S COMPLEX PROBLEMS; WE REALIZE THAT NO APPROACH WILL BE WITHOUT GREAT DIFFICULTIES, BUT WE BELIEVE THOSE DIFFICULTIES WILL BECOME FAR GREATER UNLESS AN EFFORT IS MADE NOW TO WORK TOWARD EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL.

4. VORSTER COMPLAINED IMMEDIATELY OF DOUBLE STANDARDS, THAT W APPLY OUR HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY SELECTIVELY AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA. HE ASKED WHAT WE THOUGHT OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN ZAMBIA, AND COMPLAINED OF PRESIDENT CARTER CRITICIZING SA FROM NIGERIA "WHERE THERE WAS NO PRESS FREEDOM." I SAID I DID NOT WANT TO MAKE COMPARISONS OR TO DEFEND OTHER COUNTRIES, AS EACH COUNTRY HAS TO BE JUDGED ON ITS OWN, BUT NOTED THAT ZAMBIA HAD PROVISION FOR JUDICIAL REVIEW OF DETENTIONS, AND NIGERIA HAD A VERY ACTIVE AND CRITICAL PRESS. MORE IMPORTANTLY, I NOTED THAT THE US HAS TAKEN ACTIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS GROUNDS AGAINST MANY COUNTRIES (CITING AS ONE EXAMPLE OUR NEGATIVE VOTES

IN INTERNATIONAL FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS), AND THAT SOUTH AFRICA IS CERTAINLY NOT THE ONLY PLACE WHERE WE HAVE TAKEN UP MATTERS INVOLVING "INTERNAL AFFAIRS" WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS ARE CONCERNED.

5. IN A RARE SMILE VORSTER SAID I COULD NOT BE SO NAIVE TO EXPECT HIM NOT TO SEE THAT THE US MODERATED ITS HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS TO SUIT ITS OWN INTERESTS, AS IN NIGERIA OR THE PHILIPPINES; THEN HE COMPLAINED THAT THE US HAD BEEN THE LEADER IN ACTIONS AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA. I DISPUTED THIS, NOTING THAT THE SANCTIONS TAKEN AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA LAST YEAR WERE INTERNATIONAL AND THAT THE US HAD VOTED AGAINST EVEN STRONGER MEASURES, A POINT WHICH HE ACKNOWLEDGED. I NOTED THAT OUR POSITION AT THE
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UN GENUINELY REFLECTED THE DEEP CONCERN OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE ABOUT THE BANNINGS AND DETENTIONS OF OCTOBER 19, NOTING ESPECIALLY THE DANGERS WE SAW IN CLOSING OFF THE CHANNELS FOR NON-VIOLENT DISSENT. VORSTER ARGUED THAT THE OCTOBER ACTIONS WERE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY TO MAINTAIN SECURITY AND REFERRED TO HIS EXPERIENCES AS MINISTER OF JUSTICE IN 1962-64. MOREOVER,

HE CHALLENGED THE RIGHT OR ABILITY OF ANY OUTSIDERS TO JUDGE WHICH ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS WERE OR WERE NOT A THREAT TO SECURITY.

6. VORSTER AT THIS POINT RAISED THE ISSUE OF THE EMBASSY/ICA SHOWINGS OF THE FILM "ROOTS," ASKING ME BLUNTLY WHAT OUR PURPOSE WAS IN SHOWING THE SERIES. I REPLIED THAT WE HAD FOUND A LOT OF INTEREST IN THE FILM AMONG SOUTH AFRICANS, NOTING THAT THE BOOK WAS ON SALE IN SOUTH AFRICA AND THAT IT HAD EVEN BEEN SERIALIZED IN ONE OF THE NEWSPAPERS. VORSTER INTERJECTED THAT HE HAD READ THE WHOLE BOOK AND THAT IT GROSSLY DISTORTED THE TREATMENT OF THE BLACK MAN BY WHITES; THAT "NONE OF YOUR FOREBEARS WERE AS BAD AS THAT." I SAID THAT IF ONE DID ANY EXTENSIVE RESEARCH INTO BLACK HISTORY, IT WAS CLEAR

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THAT MUCH OF THE EXPERIENCE PORTRAYED BY "ROOTS" WAS TRUE, AND THAT IT WAS PART OF THE BLACK EXPERIENCE. WE SHOWED THE FILM AS AN IMPORTANT ASPECT OF THE AMERICAN HERITAGE IN WHICH WE HAD FOUND BOTH BLACKS AND WHITES INTERESTED. WE GAVE OUT A BROCHURE NOTING THAT THE FILM WAS CONTROVERSIAL AND CITING SOME OF THE VARIOUS CRITICISMS; AT HOME THE TV SERIES HAD HAD A CONSIDERABLE IMPACT, CREATING A BETTER APPRECIATION OF WHAT THE BLACK AMERICAN EXPERIENCE HAD BEEN. VORSTER MAINTAINED THAT THE FILM WAS STIMULATING BLACK HOSTILITY TOWARD WHITES AND SUGGESTED THIS WAS OUR PURPOSE. I SAID THIS WAS CERTAINLY NOT OUR PURPOSE NOR DID WE HAVE ANY EVIDENCE TO SUGGEST THE EFFECT HE DESCRIBED, ADDING THAT IT IS OBVIOUSLY NOT ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA. VORSTER DID NOT REPEAT HIS CHALLENGE OF OUR MOTIVES BUT MAINTAINED THAT IT NONETHELESS HAD AN INCITING EFFECT UPON UNSOPHISTICATED AUDIENCES. (I DO NOT BELIEVE THE FILM HAS BEEN SHOWN TO ANY "UNSOPHISTICATED AUDIENCES," BUT THE MATTER HAS BEEN RAISED BY A CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION MP, JOHN WILEY, AND IN THE PRESS. HENCE, WE MAY HEAR MORE ABOUT THE SUBJECT UNLESS VORSTER WAS ONLY RAISING THE MATTER FOR THE RECORD.)

7. FROM TIME TO TIME VORSTER RETURNED TO THE VAGUE INDICTMENT OF US MOTIVES, A POINT WHICH I TRIED HARDEST TO CHALLENGE, SAYING I BELIEVED THE US POLICY SHOULD BE CLEAR BUT THAT OUR MOTIVES HAD BEEN MISINTERPRETED TO BE PURPOSELY HOSTILE. AT ONE POINT WE TALKED ABOUT VIENNA, AND VORSTER COMPLAINED THAT ALTHOUGH VICE PRESIDENT MONDALE HAD DECLINED THE OPPORTUNITY IN THE TALKS TO SPELL OUT WHAT STEPS SHOULD BE TAKEN TO ACHIEVE FULL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, HE HAD TOLD THE PRESS THIS MEANT ONE-MAN ONE-VOTE. I SAID WE DIDN'T CONSIDER THIS TO BE A "FORM" OF GOVT BUT A DEFINITION OF WHAT

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FULL PARTICIPATION IS. IN THIS CONNECTION, I NOTED FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA'S STATEMENT TO THE EFFECT THAT WE WERE INSISTING UPON A UNITARY STATE AND SAID THIS HAD NEVER BEEN THE CASE; NO SUCH THING WAS OUTLINED AT VIENNA; THE US IS ITSELF NOT A UNITARY STATE BUT IS A FEDERATION, YET WE CONSIDER OURSELVES TO HAVE A SYSTEM BASED ON ONE-MAN ONE-VOTE AND MAJORITY RULE. WE NEVER LAID DOWN ANY SPECIFIC BLUEPRINT OR TIMETABLE, AT VIENNA OR ELSEWHERE. EXPECTEDLY, VORSTER IMMEDIATELY RAISED THE IDEA OF INDEPENDENT HOMELANDS, BUT I NOTED THAT THESE INCLUDED MANY PEOPLE WHO HAD NO WISH TO BE INCLUDED AND WERE GIVEN NO VOICE IN THE MATTER. VORSTER ALSO MADE THE USUAL POINTS ABOUT SPENDING MORE ON DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION THAN ANY AFRICAN COUNTRY WITHOUT AID, BUT I QUESTIONED THE RELEVANCY OF COMPARISONS WITH OTHER COUNTRIES AND THE ADEQUACY OF DEVELOPMENT AS A SUBSTITUTE FOR POLITICAL RIGHTS IN ANY EVENT.

8. REFERENCE TO BOTHA'S FOREIGN POLICY SPEECH IN PARLIAMENT AND TO US MOTIVES MADE IT POSSIBLE TO SHIFT TO FOREIGN AFFAIRS, SPECIFICALLY NAMIBIA AND RHODESIA, WHERE I POINTED OUT THAT THE WESTERN PURSUIT OF PEACEFUL SETTLEMENTS WAS CLEARLY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S INTEREST. EXPRESSING HOPE FOR CONTINUED PROGRESS ON THE NAMIBIAN ISSUE, I TOLD VORSTER (AS SIR DAVID SCOTT HAD ALREADY TOLD BRAND FOURIE) THAT WE HAD LEARNED FROM PRESIDENT KAUNDA THAT ZAMBIA IS AIMING FOR A MEETING OF THE FRONT LINE PRESIDENTS SOMETIME AROUND JUNE 9, AND THAT WHILE WE COULD NOT BE SURE THE MEETING WOULD BE HELD THEN OR THAT IF HELD IT WOULD NECESSARILY RESULT IN SWAPO ACCEPTANCE OF THE CG PROPOSALS, WE WERE VERY CONCERNED THAT NO ACTION BE TAKEN THAT MIGHT COUNTER THE POSSIBILITY OF A POSITIVE OUTCOME. (I DID NOT SPECIFICALLY MENTION SOUTH AFRICAN HINTS ABOUT PROCEEDING WITH VOTER REGISTRATION, AS THE BRITISH AMB HAD ALREADY DISCUSSED THIS WITH BRAND FOURIE). VORSTER COMMENTED THAT SOUTH AFRICA COULD NOT WAIT INDEFINITELY

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BUT MADE NO SUGGESTION THAT SOUTH AFRICA CONTEMPLATED ANY EARLY ACTION. I POINTED OUT THAT WE HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN WINNING CONSIDERABLE AFRICAN SUPPORT FOR THE CG PROPOSALS AND THAT, QUITE APART FROM THE IMPORTANCE OF SWAPO'S POSITION, IT WAS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN THIS AFRICAN SUPPORT. VORSTER SEEMED TO LISTEN WITH INTEREST.

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 3 OF 3 CAPE TOWN 1148

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9. BECAUSE OF BOTHA'S OUTSPOKEN CRITICISM OF DON MCHENRY'S RECENT VISIT, I BUILT ON THE LAST POINT TO EXPRESS REGRET THAT MCHENRY'S MOTIVES HAD BEEN MISINTERPRETED, NOTING THAT COMING FROM OUTSIDE I WAS SURPRISED TO FIND THAT MANY SOUTH AFRICANS DID NOT SEEM TO REALIZE HOW MUCH DAMAGE THE CASSINGA RAID HAD DONE TO ERODEH/ PARTICULARLY AMONG AFRICAN STATES, THE FAVORABLE IMPACT OF SOUTH AFRICA'S ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONTACT GROUP PROPOSALS. VORSTER SAID THE CASSINGA RAID WAS ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAIN SECURITY AND COMPLAINED THAT NO ONE HAD TAKEN SWAPO TO TASK FOR THE THREATS OF WARFARE IT HAD MADE EVEN AFTER

SOUTH AFRICA ACCEPTED THE PROPOSALS. HE ARGUED THAT MCHENRY'S VISIT TO WINDHOEK WHILE HE AND HIS FOREIGN MINISTER WERE IN THE MIDST OF UPCS WITH THE CONTACT GROUP'S REPS IN CAPE TOWN WAS MOST UNUSUAL AND UNDIPLOMATIC. HAVING MADE MY POINT,I DID NOT ARGUE THE MATTER FURTHER.

10. ON RHODESIA, I NOTED THAT THE US AND UK HAD CONTINUED
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TO INSIST ON IMPARTIALITY TOWARD BOTH SIDES, DESPITE ACCUSATIONS TO THE CONTRARY, AND THAT WE WERE CONTINUING OUR EFFORTS THROUGH GRAHAM AND LOW TO BRING ALL THE PARTIES TOGETHER. VORSTER MADE NO COMMENT, EXCEPT

DURING THE DISCUSSION OF THE CASSINGA RAID, HE HAD MENTIONED THAT SOUTH AFRICA HAD NOT INTERFERED WHEN SAMORA MACHEL TOOK OVER MOZAMBIQUE, AS NO THREATS OR ACTIONS WERE TAKEN AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA. I NOTED THAT THIS CORRECT POSTURE TOWARD MOZAMBIQUE HAD INDEED WON SOME CREDIBILITY FOR SOUTH AFRICA IN AFRICAN EYES, WHICH PROVED THE VALUE OF RESTRAINT.

11. AT ONE POINT TOWARD THE END OF THE CONVERSATION, VORSTER COMPLAINED AGAIN OF US "MEDDLING" IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS. WHEN I DREW A DISTINCTION BETWEEN EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE APPLICATION OF INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS ON THE ONE HAND AND DIRECT "MEDDLING" IN INTERNAL POLITICAL ACTIVITIES ON THE OTHER, HE VAGUELY SUGGESTED THAT THERE HAD BEEN MEMBERS OF US MISSION STAFF IN SA WHO AT PARTIES HAD SPOKEN OF "GETTING" SOUTH AFRICA.

I SAID I COULD NOT GIVE CREDENCE TO REPORTS AT THIRD AND FOURTH HAND WHICH COULD COME FROM BIASED PARTIES BUT ASSURED HIM I WOULD BE MOST CONCERNED AT ANY EVIDENCE THAT SUCH REMARKS WERE INDEED BEING MADE. I CONCLUDED BY SAYING I HOPED HE OR FOREIGN MINISTER BOTHA WOULD LET ME KNOW IMMEDIATELY OF ANY SPECIFIC INSTANCES THAT CAME TO THEIR ATTENTION AND I WOULD BE HAPPY TO DISCUSS THESE AT ANY TIME.

12. VORSTER CONCLUDED BY SAYING HE HOPED I WOULD ENJOY MY STAY IN SOUTH AFRICA AND COURTEOUSLY ESCORTED ME TO THE DOOR.
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13. COMMENT: VORSTER WAS CHARACTERISTICALLY GRUFF, SLIGHTLY FORMAL, AND BLUNTLY OUTSPOKEN BUT NOT PERSONALLY UNFRIENDLY. ONE HAD THE FEELING THAT HE ENTERTAINS A DEEP-SET BUT WELL-CONTROLLED DANGER TOWARD THE US AND ITS POLICIES. I SAID IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR AN AMBASSADOR TO SPEAK OF MATTERS OF SUCH DIRECT INTERNAL CONCERN, BUT HE SAID I COULD SPEAK TO HIM FREELY (A REMARK I WOULD NOT TAKE TOO LITERALLY) AS "ONLY A FOOL DOES NOT LISTEN." VORSTER'S OWN COMPLAINTS, HOWEVER, MADE IT POSSIBLE, AND IMPERATIVE, TO RESTATE AMERICAN ATTITUDES. UNLIKE HIS FOREIGN MINISTER, VORSTER SEEMS TO BE A GOOD LISTENER AND WAS OBVIOUSLY INTERESTED IN WHAT I SAID ABOUT THE EFFECTS OF SOUTH AFRICAN ACTIONS AND STATEMENTS ON OTHER AFRICAN STATES.

IF ONE WERE NOT PREPARED FOR VORSTER'S BLUNT, ALMOST
RESIGNED ASSUMPTION OF UNCHANGEABLE AMERICAN HOSTILITY,
IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A DISCOURAGING BEGINNING. IT WAS NOT
UNPLEASANT, HOWEVER, AND PROVED MOST INTERESTING.
EDMONDSON

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